



# PRESS RELEASE

## House National Security Committee

### Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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#### **STATEMENT OF HONORABLE FLOYD D. SPENCE (R-SC)** **MILITARY SERVICE CHIEFS' HEARING**

*Wednesday, March 5, 1997*

Today the committee will hear from the four service chiefs of staff. Gentlemen, it is always an honor to have you appear before the committee and we welcome you.

Our witnesses today are the men in uniform whose responsibilities, interestingly enough, closely parallel those of the Congress. Like us, the chief's, primary role is to raise, train and provide for their forces. They must weigh not only what is needed to meet the near term mission, but what forces, equipment, and training will be needed beyond the turn of the century. They must take the long view, and we should too.

Over the last several years, I have met with many of our service men and women around the world. Just two weeks ago, I had an opportunity to visit with the troops down at Fort Hood and Camp LeJeune. While I remain impressed by our people's dedication and professionalism, you cannot walk away from these discussions without great concern about the impact of what "doing more with less" really means. As budgets and forces shrink – at the same time that missions grow – "doing more with less" is wearing down the military that won the Cold War, fought the Gulf War, and preserves the peace we enjoy today.

For many years now, representatives of the services have testified before this committee that their forces are "on the razor's edge" of readiness. It is not hard to see what this means when I talk with soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines out in the field. It means personnel shortages and turbulence; it means less rigorous and consistent maintenance of equipment; and it means an eroding quality of life that inevitably results in patriotic American's questioning the value of a life in military service.

Perhaps most disturbingly, I believe we are also beginning to see a diminishing quantity and quality of training, especially training for the high intensity warfighting tasks that are the unique mission of our armed forces. At the major training centers – the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, schools like Top Gun, Red Flag and Air Warrior, and Twenty-nine Palms in California – an increasingly common perspective of the instructors and trainers is that our forces are not performing as well as they used to. All of these are unmistakable signs of an underfunded and overextended institution.

These are not the kinds of problems that appear on television or in headlines. The public sees an Army in Bosnia executing a delicate and dangerous mission. It sees aircraft carriers that steam to trouble spots, bringing with them stability and security for anxious allies. It sees fighter aircraft patrolling the skies over Iraq and Bosnia with impunity. It sees Marines called to rescue noncombatants from Liberia and extracting downed pilots from behind enemy lines.

The public still sees the tip of the spear, and the tip of the spear is still razor sharp. But what the public does not see is the mounting price being paid by the rest of the force to keep the tip of the spear sharp – a force that is slowly hollowing and weakening.

The U.S. military is still the finest fighting force on earth. It is robust and resilient, but not infinitely so. It can do a lot of peacekeeping, and it can enforce a lot of no-fly-zones in an environment of declining budgets and shrinking forces. But it cannot continue to conduct these extensive peacekeeping and humanitarian operations and remain razor sharp to execute the national military strategy if necessary. As one Army division returning from Bosnia officially reported it was [quote] “not trained to standard in high-intensity-conflict tasks” because “attack and defend tasks at company level have not been exercised since September 1995.” [unquote]

Our witnesses today know better than anyone what it means to prepare a force for war – a large force, capable of prevailing swiftly, decisively and with minimal casualties. They also know better than anyone the very real implications of overworking people, maintenance shortfalls, a declining quality of life, and diminished high intensity training.

So I hope we can get past the traditional “razor’s edge” metaphor this morning. If you sit on a “razor” too long you will eventually bleed to death. The committee needs an honest assessment of the risk your services are running when it comes to staying prepared to fight and win wars where vital national interests are at stake. I believe this is the criteria by which all of us charged with providing for the common defense will be judged in the long run. It will not be on how well we tried to build nations where there were none, not how well we provided humanitarian relief, or fought forest fires – as worthy as such undertakings may be.